

Group led by mystic buys Arlington hotel

By LAURA VOZZELLA
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

ARLINGTON — American Airlines pilots could be taking to the skies with renewed peace of mind if they continue lodging at the Flagship Inn, which was sold last week to a group led by the father of transcendental meditation, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The aging Avenue H hotel will become a part of the Heaven on Earth Inns hotel chain, as will the Hilton Inn, a defunct Dallas hotel purchased this month by the World Plan Executive Council. The council is led by the maharishi, onetime spiritual adviser to the Beatles whose meditation movement is said to have 4 million followers.

Heartland Federal Savings and Loan Association of Ponca City, Okla., which acquired Flagship in a loan foreclosure at least three years ago, sold the 275-room hotel for about \$1.5 million, said Bruce Beal, national director of operations for Houston-based Heaven on Earth Inns Corp.

Heaven on Earth plans to develop its newly acquired Dallas property, Hiltop Inn, into a combination

hotel and transcendental meditation school, with the ultimate goal of establishing a four-year university centered on living in harmony with nature.

By comparison, Flagship will be more of a conventional hotel, Beal said. Heaven on Earth Flagship, a possible name for the new hotel, would like to maintain its contract with American Airlines, which rents most of the hotel's rooms for pilots staying in the area for training or recertification, he said.

"The main thing we want to do is renovate it and just concentrate on the contract business," Beal said.

But the hotel will offer classes in transcendental meditation, or TM, to guests and staff.

"That option is certainly open, but it's not such an emphasis here," Beal said.

The hotel also will provide healthier food in its restaurant, designate most rooms as nonsmoking, limit staff smoking to outdoor areas and possibly serve only juice drinks in the bar, Beal said.

The hotel will try to keep as many of its 85 employees as possible, Beal said. Nevertheless, several workers

interviewed yesterday expressed concern about the new owner. The employees, who asked not to be identified, were worried about job security and suspicious of the new corporate culture.

"The maids said they [representatives of Heaven on Earth] all have pictures of that guy in their rooms," one worker said, referring to the maharishi.

Beal said there was no cult of personality surrounding the Maharishi.

"I have a picture of maharishi in my room — not because I worship him," Beal said. "He's just a good guy. I'm an Episcopalian."

And he emphasized that the organization would not push the Maharishi's teachings on employees or guests.

"We make ourselves available," Beal said. "We don't proselytize or impose."

The maharishi's followers meditate each day, chanting mantras to achieve a state of alertness and calm. TM is said to reduce stress, enhance creativity and, at the most advanced levels, allow people to levitate.

The Indian-born founder of the 35-year-old transcendental movement made headlines early this year when he offered to wipe out crime in 60 U.S. cities, including Dallas and Fort Worth, by dispatching teams whose collective meditation would radiate positive influences on the environment. None of the cities took the maharishi up on his offer, which for Fort Worth came with an \$18 million price tag.

The maharishi lives in Holland and has no immediate plans to visit Arlington, Beal said.

Heaven on Earth owns two hotels in Houston and one each in Detroit, Denver and Cleveland, Beal said. World Plan also hopes to develop theme parks near Orlando, Fla., and on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls.

Once known for its posh Crystal Palace ballroom, the 19-acre Flagship complex began losing convention business to newer hotels and abandoned that niche for the contract business several years ago. Plans call for restoring the now-closed ballroom to its original splendor and going after the convention and tourist trade, Beal said.

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